Nunc dimittis

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/4968841.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Post-Episode: s03e13 The Wrath of the Lamb, Mild Angst, Mentions of Cancer, bittersweet fluff, Growing Old Together, Tissue Warning, I'm Sorry
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-10-10 Words: 2,557 Chapters: 1/1

Nunc dimittis

by KareliaSweet

Summary

The four times Will leaves Hannibal over the course of twenty-eight years (and the one time he doesn't).

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The first time Will leaves Hannibal, it's less than two months after their fall. They are barely healed when Will discovers that Hannibal intends to make good on his threats to Alana Bloom. He insists upon finding her and her family and gutting them all.

Will has already killed with Hannibal twice now, enjoyed it even, but in this he is adamant in granting mercy.

"No," he insists, "not her. *Never* her."

"I made a promise," Hannibal says, unbearably calm.

"And?" Will is already boiling deep in his rage. "How many promises have you made to me and broken? Promises are teacups to you."

"Some vows I will always keep," Hannibal reaches for Will, but he stiffens and doubles their distance. Hannibal takes this in and sniffs indignantly.

"Do you still have love for her? Is this what angers you?"

Will scrubs both hands across his thickening beard and up through his hair, exhaling loudly in frustration.

"Jesus Hannibal, is this really about jealousy?" He shakes his head and smacks a hand hard against the kitchen counter. "Just because we're fucking doesn't mean you're my wife."

It is needlessly cruel, and even in the midst of his fury Will regrets it.

"I didn't mean-" he starts, but Hannibal already has a hand around his throat and pinned him to the wall.

"Do you think I have not married myself to you, Will?" He leans in and drags his cheek against his, stubble rasping painful and sweet.

"You may hurl invective, but the truth remains that I *do* belong to you, and you to me."

Will can't help but arch into his touch, his body now automatically tuned to fit to Hannibal's with ease and precision. He clutches fistfuls of Hannibal's shirt and turns his head towards a kiss, but shakes his lust aside and shoves him away.

"Not if it means this," he spits. "Not her life. Not Margot's."

He steps into Hannibal, eyes meeting fierce with warning. "Not a child's."

He storms down the hall then, into the bedroom, and grabs one of the emergency bags that they keep in the back of the walk-in. He leaves its twin behind.

Hannibal follows him in and has the gall to laugh, albeit without mirth.

"You are not leaving, Will."

“Watch me,” Will says, shoving past him and back down the hall, taking the keys to the boat from the kitchen drawer.

“If you leave,” Hannibal says, and does not bother to siphon any of the cruelty from his voice, “it will only guarantee her pain.”

“At least I won’t be inflicting it,” Will snaps, and slams the door behind him.

He stays on the open water for five days until his phone rings.

“Hello?”

“He misses you.”

Alana sounds vaguely incovenienced but definitely unharmed.

“Alana? Are you-”

“Will you come home?” She is clearly frustrated, and Will can tell by her tone that although Hannibal is with her, he is being more of a nuisance than a threat.

“What about his promise?” Will asks, and hears a slight shuffle over the line followed by a weighted pause.

“He says that in order to make a new promise, one must sometimes break an old promise.” She sighs, heavy and resigned. “Something with teacups. Just say you’re coming home, Will. We both know you’re going to and I promised *my* wife I’d be home for dinner.”

Will almost laughs at this until he sees what her words represent. A vast chasm between their old friendship and his new life, one that she accepts but divorces herself from. He can barely make her out now, a pinpoint hanging on the farthest end of a dark canyon littered with sad and unsaid things. He knows this will be the last time he ever speaks to her, but he doesn’t bother with platitudes. She’ll only cast them aside.

“I’m on my way,” he says, and hangs up the phone.

He arrives home at dusk and is barely through the door before Hannibal has him pinned down, all teeth and fury. His hand is already tugging Will’s pants open and dipping inside to press a palm to his length.

“If you leave me again,” he growls between claiming kisses, squeezing hard, “I will kill you.”

“I know,” Will says, curving against him, and bites back.

-x-

Five years later, Will leaves Hannibal again, but this time it’s involuntary. A particularly zealous Interpol agent manages to catch him in a moment of negligence, and Will is put in a temporary holding cell awaiting extradition. Jack Crawford comes all the way from America

to see him, and when he visits Will he says nothing. He stares at him with broken eyes through bulletproof glass for thirty minutes and leaves without a word.

Hannibal breaks him out in six days and Will knows he could have done it in three, but he supposes he is being punished for his carelessness. When he takes him home it is to a different home in a different country, but a new dog is waiting for them and Will decides Hannibal isn't that angry with him after all.

"I thought you were going to kill me if I left you again," Will says into his mouth that night.

"Yes," Hannibal murmurs against his skin, his hands everywhere, parched for Will's touch. "A teacup promise."

When Will feels Hannibal enter him he moans low in his throat and forgets his death completely.

-x-

Twelve years later, Will leaves again. Almost two decades of traveling and killing have worn on his body and he is exhausted. He wants peace and quiet, and Hannibal does not.

He storms out after a particularly nasty argument and walks into the woods, uncaring of cold or predators. He lasts for three hours before he turns back, grumbling to himself the whole way.

He doesn't bother to apologize when he comes back inside, and neither does Hannibal.

"Aren't you going to ask if I'm going to kill you?" Hannibal says calmly from his armchair. He doesn't even look up from his book.

"Nah," Will says, scratching the back of his neck and rubbing the kinks out, "who's going to take care of you then, old man?"

Hannibal looks up at this, huffs loudly, then returns to his book.

"Old man indeed," he mutters, "I should bend you over my knee and punish you then, *my boy*."

Will's groin stirs and he looks down in mingled surprise and pride. *Not dead after all*, he smirks, and he throws himself on Hannibal's lap, tossing the book to the floor.

He knows how silly he must look, pushing sixty and cradling himself in the arms of a man a decade senior. He traces the lines that have formed on Hannibal's face, slides his fingers through fine, silver hair.

"I could never leave you," he says, and it's the forgotten voice of a Will Graham who first found beauty over a dying man.

Hannibal smiles, knotted hands rising to gently brush Will's cheekbones, the scar there now faded under the wrinkles he wears so well.

They make love slowly and carefully, and Will almost cries for how much he's missed it.

-x-

Hannibal leaves Will next.

After seventy-three years of seemingly unsurmountable strength, it is cancer, not carnage, that claims him. Will nurses him and holds him as his hair grows brittle and his skin grows translucent and grey. He cooks him bland simple meals and he knows Hannibal loathes them, but his stomach tolerates very little in the way of rich foods anymore. He reads to him when his eyesight begins to falter and strokes his hand every night until he falls asleep. After a certain point, that's all he can do.

When he is near the end, Will lies in bed with him, arms around him gentle and careful. It pains him to see his great predator so helpless, but it's better than the pain of knowing that soon he won't be there at all.

He watches Hannibal sleep in fitted starts, breathing shallow and uneven. He strokes delicately along his skin, trying not to wake him but desperate to touch every part of him until he no longer can. Hannibal's eyes flutter under deeply hooded lids and he moans quietly.

"Stay," Hannibal says, clutching at Will's wrist.

"Of course," Will replies, smoothing back Hannibal's hair, "I'm here, I'm here."

"No," Hannibal grips him tighter, "*Stay*, Will. Remember who the enemy is."

Will has cried many times over Hannibal in his life, but these tears hurt the most, burning deep tracks that cut into his cheeks.

"I took you to my death with me before," Will hears his voice crack, "why won't you take me with you now?"

Hannibal smiles, lifts a shaking hand and presses it to Will's mouth. Will brushes his lips against it and holds it to his face with trembling fingers.

"There is nowhere to take you to," Hannibal says, "no place for you to follow. This will be the last time we see each other, Will." He strokes a calloused thumb down to his lips. "Let me see you."

Will kisses him, delicate and gentle, his tears washing against Hannibal's dry lips.

"I love you," he says, and hates that the first time he says the words aloud also mean goodbye.

Hannibal smiles, eyes wet and grateful. "I know," he says simply, "but it is very nice to hear."

Will coughs out an open sob and lays his head on Hannibal's chest, absorbing the frail heartbeat as though keeping it within himself will keep Hannibal alive.

“I don’t know how to be without you,” he cries, and it sounds so childish, but it is fundamentally true. The very essence of himself has been twined with Hannibal’s soul for so long, he has forgotten how to exist without it.

“You know where I will always be,” Hannibal says, tapping a finger to Will’s temple. “Florence. Baltimore. Morocco. Here. You have made a home for me in your memory palace, I will not be so rude as to vacate that as well.”

He winds thin arms around Will as he weeps, nuzzling against his thinning hair.

“Promise you will stay,” Hannibal pleads, “and not a teacup promise.”

Even knowing it means years of loneliness ahead, Will has no choice but to grant his wish. This is what love means, he realizes with bitter poignancy.

“I promise,” he whispers against Hannibal’s heart.

“I love you, my dear Will,” Hannibal says. Satisfied with his last words, he closes his eyes.

-x-

Will buries Hannibal in the garden. It is a long and arduous job for a man of his years, but decades of honed physical stamina accrued through hunting make the job somewhat bearable. Murder, he realizes grimly, has kept him alive.

For seven more years, Will exists. He reads, he cooks, he drinks - more than he should but not enough to break his promise. He cares for his dogs as they slowly die off. He does not replace them. He refuses to visit his memory palace, even though he knows who is waiting for him. Remnants of Hannibal and their life together become too much to bear and he leaves their house behind, buying a remote lakeside cabin with the money they had left. He brings enough memories to keep him alive and burns the rest.

He starts fishing again but he finds arthritis makes casting a line frustratingly difficult, so he takes his boat and sits on the water from sunrise until sunset, silently watching the world move without him. Eventually he stops bringing the pole.

After the last dog dies and Will feels the extent of his solitude, he closes his eyes and opens a door.

Hannibal is thirty years younger and achingly vibrant. Will burns bright at the sight of him.

“Hello, Will,” he says, “you’re just in time for our appointment.”

“Really?” Will sets down his shoulder bag and enters the office, examining the unchanged surroundings. “I feel like I’ve missed a few.”

“I have kept our standing appointment,” Hannibal smiles, “you’re on time for this one.”

They sit in their opposite chairs. Hannibal crosses his legs and drinks him in.

“Where shall we begin?”

-x-

At first he keeps his visits to once a week, but the pain of parting sings too much and they quickly become daily. Eventually they stop meeting in Hannibal’s office and start meeting in their old home. Sometimes he visits him in Florence. Sometimes the visits are in their bed. Mostly they talk. Occasionally they are silent. Will tells Hannibal how much he misses him, and every time Hannibal’s response is the same.

“I am here, Will.”

Will knows that he isn’t, not really. He knows that he’s visiting an echo of a long dead piece of him, but this temporary resurrection is all he has, and he lets himself believe it because he is an old man, and tired, and he wants to be happy – even for a moment. He’s been alone for so long and everything hurts all the time and *goddamnit,* he thinks, he deserves this, even if it’s just pretend.

On his last visit, he meets Hannibal in his house by the sea on a grey Sunday afternoon. They finally drink their glass of wine. He watches the rain patter against the windows and leans his head on Hannibal’s shoulder.

“This is where we started our lives together,” he says quietly, looking out at the barren fire pit and the empty courtyard. He blinks and the Dragon’s body reappears, an ocean of blood tucked under him.

“Or ended them,” Hannibal replies, snaking his arm around Will’s waist.

“Do you regret your becoming?” Hannibal asks, and Will turns to face him.

“Always,” Will says quietly, kissing the wine from his lips, “and never.”

He pushes a hand underneath Hannibal’s shirt, stroking at the smooth skin that hasn’t been shot through and scarred yet.

“Never,” he whispers, and feels the scar form underneath his fingers. Hannibal’s fingers splay over his and he breathes quietly at the touch, feeling the hum between them grow.

Pain spikes through Will’s chest and the hum abruptly stops.

Will’s feels his fingers falter and spasm, his lungs go tight and numbness creeps along his shoulder. Realization and fear mingle within him and he looks at Hannibal with wide eyes. Hannibal observes him, sad and calm, and nods in understanding. Will sits heavily in the chair behind him.

He suddenly feels very tired.

“I have to go,” he says, and leaves Hannibal for the last time.

He puts his head back, closes his eyes, and wades into the quiet of the stream.

-x-

When he opens his eyes, he is standing in the Uffizi. Before him sits a young man, studying the Primavera intently and sketching in a leather-bound pad with graceful hands. Will smiles.

It's nice to see that, for once, Hannibal was wrong.

He crosses the atrium floor and sits next to the man, who sets down his charcoal and turns to look at him. His smile is quiet and small, but his eyes shine with an eternity of devotion.

"If I saw you every day, forever Will," Hannibal says, "I would remember this time."

Will smiles wide enough to split his heart.

He will not be leaving again.

End Notes

I'm so sorry, you guys. This is what happens when I say I'm going to only write fluff and smut.
Back to regularly scheduled schmooping next, I promise!

Read the ultra-ultra-depressing companion piece here

tumblr: lovecrimevariations

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!